



the prairie light review
spring 2010



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Past Lives by Denis Hagen

College of DuPage

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Letter from the Editor

Kimberly Steele

We have had a great semester at the Prairie Light Review and are proud to share with you our latest issue. I encourage everyone to continue to create and submit such thought provoking and impressive art.

My year at PLR has been both fun and challenging. I've had the opportunity to meet and work with kind, intelligent, and artistic people, as well as the chance to participate in engaging discussions. And although my term is coming to an end I look forward to reading future issues and am so thankful that I had the opportunity to be a part of this great and enduring magazine. I am certain it will remain one of the most meaningful experiences of my life.

Once again I'd like to say a huge thank you to the PLR editorial staff and volunteers. None of this would have been possible with their hard work and dedication. I'd especially like to thank Veronica Shukin for going above and beyond this semester. Also, I would like to thank our faculty advisor Jackie McGrath. I think all of us here at PLR realize how lucky we are to have Jackie as our advisor. I admire Jackie for her optimistic spirit and her commitment to College of DuPage students.

Special Thanks

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Winner of the 2010 Prairie Fiction Award

Submission Guidelines

Please submit original works of short fiction, nonfiction, poetry, photography and 2-D and 3-D artwork of any media from students, faculty, staff and the College of DuPage District 502 community. All submissions are anonymously reviewed twice a year for fall and spring issues. Guidelines for the presentation of your work and letters of authenticity may be found online at www.prairielightreview.org. Questions? Contact the editors at plre@cod.edu or 630-942-2733.

Join the PLR Editorial Team

Work collaboratively with classmates in English 2210 to create and market the next issue of *The Prairie Light Review*, College of DuPage's award-winning literary magazine. As a member of the editorial team, you will experience many different publication techniques, including tracking submissions, content selection, layout decisions, copyediting, distribution, office management, marketing, fundraising, and coordinating special events like open mics.

To join the editorial team, enroll in English 2210. You will find more information about the course at www.prairielightreview.org. This course meets on the Glen Ellyn Campus, SRC 1558, on Wednesdays from 12:00 p.m. to 1:50 p.m. each term. Please contact Advisor Jackie McGrath with questions at mcgrathj@cod.edu or 630-942-2709.



Contact the staff at www.prairielightreview.org.

Georgie Porgie

Tom Hill

That pudgy bastard, she thought.
After all the pudding I prepared,
after all the promises and plans
and sweet nothings, I find
that all men are pigs;
some more than others.

Still, her heart seemed to leap
thinking of that first,
sweet moment.
He leans in,
lips close
and tremulous,
giving her what
he'd given all
the others

dear Overachiever, just take a breather.
Be a little more mainstream, little less pipedream.
'Stead of fishin' in the jet stream, join somebody's sports team.
Hey daydreamer, listen up: reality's still here.
Your desire to be clever is holding you back.
Maybe, if your thoughts matched mine,
we could work together someday.
But, that story's been and done.
Now the truth's the only way to hide the lies
'cause you twisted the meaning to better your cause,
and you told all the kids that "if you can't make love at a photoshoot
then you can't make love in a war
'cause life isn't freshman English class.
So don't write another boring song
about someone else's life."
And that was all with help and love from another who's collecting herself
from bits of others and cautious dares
to do something bold and to overachieve
who'll for once in her life
not take a breather, from Underachiever

dear Underachiever, I'm taking that breather.
Living in yesterday's tomorrow, not asking for time to borrow.
If my minutes weren't so wasted, like kids in a bar,
naturally, my bittersweet informal wishes, made at every other chance,
would be reached and given up
for a second "better" chance.
Hey dream-maker, pay attention: this came from your advice.
These snapshots of imagination should be
reinvented like the wheel, torn up, and used again.
But, only if it's worth the risk of being told you're average,
like the length of your Levi's or that girl you didn't like.
'Cause I also told the kids: "never believe a boring love song
that seems too out of place. Cliché and in-demand means everything today.
Upperclassmen of 'Thinking realized this so long ago: if it won't be monumental,
do it someway else."
Lies that can be hidden, or, better yet, un-did, always do turn up somehow.
And, you're right, my cause was indeed improved.
So, read this with several grains of salt, and, believe me: I'm saying this from the
perspective of a writer,
and a teaser, and a "yet to be discovered"
who's ruining her breather, from Overachiever

dear Overachiever, so much for your breather.
Look at you sinking: over-thinking under-thinking.
If you didn't run towards the stars, like one struck in a moment of "I have potential," then,
potentially, you, assuming you would, could not waste those minutes in the bars of your mind.
A wish such as this is likely more a heart-felt prayer
and said quickly out of need, but, is rather completely lacking faith.
Hey dream-chaser: take a hint: success - it only holds so strong.
Pictures are never average, instead they're simply done completely wrong,
like a toddler tying laces, or a preteen's sloppy kiss.
What you didn't tell the kids was that
"boring is what is interesting, minus everything important.
Therefore, never test your thoughts and feelings more than you have studied
'cause if you're unprepared, it's no better than un-important."
Truth is always enough, unless not everyone agrees.
And twisting beliefs is like twisting friends:
not always mutual,
and tends to end in shame,
like a game, lost, even after cheating.
Taken with that understanding, a little extra salt, and love,
keep shooting for that breather, from Underachiever.

Ones and Twos

Tamara Amanda Bryant

Two on a balcony, facing a tree, one sees dying leaves, one sees dying moments. The discolored remnants of an unforgettable spring floating in ones and twos to the unnoticed depths of the grass below. It is a question of abstract perspective.

One on a path, listening, as wicked wind rips the moments from a hundred trees at once, and scatters them. The sound of the violence is a symphony of death and of loss. The notes of this movement are familiar, for the melody was plagiarized from the summer rain, and the notes become unlikely inspirations in ones and twos. It is the riddle of momentary contentment.

One standing in the rain, the heavenly host of droplets, liquid life fallen from grace and sacrificed by a faithless sky to a thirsty, thankless earth to feed the trees, the very same trees that now sacrifice their moments to the ravenous wind – some reluctantly, some eagerly. The last of the moments will fall away in ones and twos. It is a mystery of unwanted dreams.

One making love to late October. Fingers of chill wind caress my face, mists drench me in a glistening of cold, false sweat, while I wait impatiently beneath the trees, to snatch dead moments from mid-air so that I may cover them in paper and stroke them with autumn-colored chalk until words and lines appear in ones and twos. The outline of a poem forms on the page. It is the agony of ambiguity made bearable.

The Things Which Cannot Be Seen

Richard Marshalla

Behind the wall of five senses
And the doors of perception
There is an invisible landscape
In which we are unaware of

A world of floating shapes
Neon shadows
And incomprehensible ideas

Giant eagles carve hieroglyphics
In purple star temples
Orange rabbits hop on the ceiling
Mocking the limits of human comprehension

Faceless clowns juggle lightning bolts
While ideas and language
Are manifested in physical form

Oceans of glowing gases
Rocks that speak to one another
Rooms where time can be experienced diagonally
And palm trees that feed on x-rays

Some say none of this exists
Maybe it is more real than you or I
Those who wish to dwell here
Put their sanity at risk
But to find enlightenment
Sometimes it's worth it

A White Guy Watches Alpha Ya Ya Diallo and His Bafing Riders Perform at the Local Arts Center

Jason Snart

That white guy – okay, to be perfectly honest,
is me, spraddle-legged in a velvet
balcony seat, watching Guinean Diallo
perform for fifty, maybe a hundred
or so suburban folks all nodding along
to songs about love, and panic,
and freedom.

At the break
I consider a glass of wine, but
run into Felipe, a colleague
who teaches Spanish and Psych. He asks,
do I know what the drum
is called, the drum that's been giving
up six beats against
Diallo's four: *a jembe*,
he says. Oh, with a d: *djembe*.
A crossword word
I've run into.

My daughter and I, says Felipe,
like to jam. And he hooks the air
with his fingers, conditioning "jam."
She plays her little drum and I play
the big drum. And this is my friend,
he says, of the man who's walked up,
he's beaded to Africa
in two weeks.

In two weeks
I'll be there. He rolls his eyes
when I mention the flight. *I waste a day in Paris,*
then four and half hours
to the Senegal coast.

The lights dim,
like a guy with a trick knee
that gives way a bit,
so Felipe and his friend
head back inside and I'm off
to the balcony where I sit and look down
at the djembe, waiting
for something to happen.

Aloneliness

Kristina Noel Kroger

a green pane of glass, green, green, wine-bottle green
hugs me close—I'm getting drunk on the loneliness.
This sweet, sloshing, burning liquid

Stumbling bumbling in a neon night, hedonism at its finest
sweet pleasures like peaches on my tongue
flesh rises before me, but I am alone

smoky wind, red moon, winking city, laughing
the coyote with the green fire in its eyes
is the mystery in the dark alley

Ah, metropolis of sin,
I walk your shadowed avenues
giggling with my shadow

Never Torn

Veronica Shukin

We wrote our feelings on the water
They didn't stay
We didn't notice

They took our picture in the dark
It didn't look good
But, that's ok

He brought her love out through the doorway
She didn't follow
He didn't care

She lied again then told the truth
The words were lost
But still unbroken

We found the photos from the park
Never gone
Simply hiding

They buried anger in the garden
But nothing grew
As we expected

He left with the love she'd given him
In a pocket with a hole
Scattered by the wind

She spoke with wisdom much too late
The words were silent
But heard by Him

Now we know to keep our love
Safe within us
Never torn

As I Was Once With You

Valerie Tapp

When I was with you
you took me for granted,
not knowing what you owed me
until I stepped away from you.

When I was with you
people stared as you entered a room
with my arm around your shoulder.
People watched you with envy
and you did not understand
why they hated you
and were waiting

to see the day
when you were jilted by me,
after the sting of my abandonment
shocked you down to your bones,
after the rage of regret
over wasted years was spent

your understanding has drowned you
in the waters of old age.
You remember me
as the greatest love you ever had,
I am the one that has left you wanting.

I hang on the shoulder
of someone else,
as you stare at us across
the smokey bar room of life,
the sweet drinks of ideals and high hopes
no longer being brought to your table,

instead the bitter beer of reality
and jaded views flow on your palate
and you try to swallow the pride
of knowing it was you
who wasted your time with me.

As I was once with you,
I am now with someone else.
I am youth.



charcoal pencil

Story for Richard

Christine Aument

Once upon a time
There was a me, there was a you.
Library dads, working moms.
School introduces us, volunteers all.

A friendship blossoms.
It wanes, then grows, then wanes again
As our worlds scurry
Down varied paths.

Little boys grow into lanky teens,
Then to twenty-somethings,
Forging their way through life's forests
As we alternately encourage, cringe and cower.

Enflamed by an unexpected bond,
Our friendship sprouts in new directions,
To broader horizons
As freedom rings for us as well.

Two poets linked in correspondence;
Two friends sharing life's travails.
There is a you, there is a me –
Once upon a time.

Ode to the CTA

Hector Cruz

This...is Grand.
This...is Damen.
This...is a pathetic excuse
For a transportation system.
Doors...closing.

The CTA.
Where every other day
Is doomsday.
Oh no,
Another fare hike is coming!

Blame the governor,
Blame the mayor,
Blame the president,
Just don't blame the CTA.

Ride on one of our luxurious trains,
Which reach all corners of the city—
Unless you try to go too far south or west
To one of those undesirable areas.

Instead try Lincoln Park,
Where you can be seen and mingle
With all of your fellow Chads and Trixies,
At all the trendiest bars and restaurants.

For you more creative types,
Try Wicker Park where you can
Get a sense of the true bohemian lifestyle,
Surrounded by former residents of the North Shore
Who pay \$3,000 a month for their loft
With their parents' money.
Ah, the simple life.

Just make sure you leave an hour ahead:
There's maintenance on the tracks at Western.
And doors won't open on the left or right
At Addison because the station is closed
For repair.

Instead try one of our overcrowded bus lines!
Just be careful when using one of our bike racks
Or one of our careless drivers might run you over
With one of our top of the line buses.

We're the CTA,
And we're doing the best we can.

The Poet of Hartford Accident and Indemnity

Lisa Higgins

Wallace Stevens on his walk to work
wondering where the words come from.

Wondering what he might do if he found an extra moment
tucked between the actuarial tables and metal filing cabinets.

Stevens asked, "Brownie, what do you think imagination is?"
And Brownie didn't know, so Stevens never asked again.

How lonely to be a poet in an insurance agency.
How slow the time, how slim the space for thought.

What might I do in the sliver between my obligations?
What thoughts on the drive home that Stevens might share?

mood swings like thought streams
drugged by the delusion of simple thoughts of a complex nature screaming ideals
into your ideas

waking dreams like curtain calls
on a moment and a memory lived and loved by that breath of the artificial
uncertainty of
your beliefs

misread glances like paranoid stares
of the impaired eyes of the confused yet hopeful and ever-wandering spaces within
your soul

tripping reality like fooling fate
impossibly pursued and left unachieved except by imaginary truths believed only in
your mind

living minutes like "carpe diem!"
meant in the most cliché way yet one of those often uttered phrases you mumble to
yourself

racing emotions like offbeat pulses
daring to feel, begging to be, longing to dare, feeling to beg, being to long for
your embrace

whispered secrets like unspoken bonds
shared between breathing and laughter and silent moments filled with the beauty of
your life

teasing smiles like silly kisses
full of meaning but hiding as if waiting for the right moment to open up and reveal
to me
your love

In the Black and White

Tamara Amanda Bryant

We've been sitting at the kitchen table for hours. I have been staring at the clock above your head wondering how the silence between us would finally break when I look back at you. You are busy writing notes in the salt you'd poured out on the table. Among your frenzied scroll I am able to make out the words, "Sometimes I hate you." Without saying a word, I yank the pepper shaker from the middle of the table, open it, and pour it out on top of your salt-art.

Using my fingers to mix the tiny grains and spread them out, I smile as you watch me. Your face portrays calm curiosity. We always play these games, don't we? We both have perfected our poker faces. My index finger slides through the mixture spelling out, "Sometimes I love you, too."

Your lips turn up into a sinister smile and you break the silence with, "The absence of hate is not love, darling." I grip the empty pepper shaker in my fist, wondering how the cool glass would look shattered on the wall behind you, just below the ticking clock. I've given myself plenty of time to calm down. The pepper shaker in my hand has become comfortably warm, like a smoother extension of me. I release it. In one fluid movement, it smashes against the wall having sailed just inches past your left ear. My eyes never leave yours and you never flinch.

You are in the middle of creating a new message in the mess on the table. When you're done it reads, "Sometimes I do love you, though."

I sit back in my chair, crossing my arms and closing my eyes, both hating and loving the way you always win. You stifle a yawn. The first movement I've seen since you completed your note. I reach for your hand scattering the grains on the table. I let the tears fall where they will. My voice cracks, "Truth is, even when I hate you I still love you."

You smile at my emotional display broadly and finally say, "I know." I'm back in your arms, running my fingers across your bare back, feeling the grains of salt and pepper fall away. The room echoes the sounds of my defenses shattering like smooth glass against the kitchen walls.

Hong Kong Lights

J.T. Lundy

The gangplank clanked as we stepped onto the ferry. The stairs in front of us led to first class, reserved for the British and wealthy Chinese. We stayed to the left and therefore bottom of the boat. Second class, steerage – whatever you wanted to call it we had no other choice. We had gone bust in Macau and were on the Ferry back to Hong Kong.

It was 1986, back when Macau was tough, not the Disneyfied casino-land it is today. Back then there were no bells and whistles, when you got ripped off you knew it.

And ripped off we were. How could the two old, fat jai-alai players we bet against win every game? Jai-alai, a young man's game - a game of speed and agility where the ball can be flung faster than a 180 mph. Explain that.

Mark, Adil and I were on break from college and thought we were pretty smart, but you wouldn't have known. We stopped betting on jai-alai and descended into the blackjack room, the only non-Chinese in the place. We sat down at a table and did not leave when the empty chairs immediately filled up around us, playing on though the cards were torn and badly warped. Played on until we were flat broke. And it was hard enough to get out at that – we had to stiff the dealer who actually expected a tip. Yeah, we were smart all right.

The bottom deck of the ferry was metal with peeling red paint. It noisily vibrated from the rumbling diesel. White plastic tables and chairs were filled with Chinese laborers making the two-hour commute back to Hong Kong. They were too tired to care about us – strangers in their world.

A TV blared with old Kung Fu soap operas in Chinese. It hung from the ceiling over the kitchen front counter. Steam, smoke and the smell of fried rice and noodles billowed out. Second class was hard and gritty. I didn't smoke, but if I did this was the place for it.

Waiters in tuxedos carried food upstairs with fine china and silverware. Adil bought some fried rice (he had been holding out on us) that we shared with wooden chopsticks from cardboard trays.

The ferry had been traveling along the coast of China for only an hour and I already despised the first class passengers. They sat up top with their plush seats and tablecloths, reading the *Times* and watching the BBC. What would I feel like if I did this everyday? Only a few stairs separated us, but we were miles, countries apart even.

And what a difference a day makes. Yesterday we were at a posh party atop The Peninsula with girls from Adil's English high school in Hong Kong. Adil was Indian, but could speak neither Chinese nor his parent's Urdu, only English – a curious consequence of the British Empire.

The party looked out over the sprawl of Hong Kong. It was an adult party - a power party for the ruling Brits. The only Chinese there were the help.

The girls had wanted to meet Adil's American friends and with, at least, Mark they were not disappointed. No girl ever was.

Mark was probably the best looking American male in all of China. Tall with blond hair and blue eyes, he had a smile like Robert Redford and he knew it. But he was not cocky at all, only worse - he forced himself to be humble and the act drove the girls crazy - a nice guy.

The girls circled around Mark smiling and laughing competitively. Adil and I, weary from the girls' shameless display of alluring expressions, walked away and looked out the window. We were too early anyway. Mark was top gun and Adil and I were not even wingman, we were like mechanics. Only after Mark locked in on a lucky girl would we have a chance to assuage the losers' spirits.

The affluent party atop the most capitalist city in the world was a far cry from Macau and our ferry ride.

The ferry approached the city after nightfall. A cool breeze wafted over us and we were silent. We leaned over the rail, mesmerized by the lights of Hong Kong and Kowloon Bay. They were everywhere; sparkling green, red, white, and blue, on giant cargo ships to little junks moving to and from the center fire of the city itself. They spread out up into the hills and leaped over to the island creating one of the most beautiful sights anywhere. And the good thing was – the lights were for everyone.

A Storm is Coming

Courtney Bobko



black and white acrylic on canvas

Before the Storm Wet the Earth

Jason Sturner

A ladybug landed on my knee
as I sat alone in a meadow
awaiting the rain.

With its tiny head cocked
and a trust in my silence
it seemed to ask,

“Do you think I am beautiful?”

But all I could do
was look away
and wonder what stories
my face was telling.

Photographs Taken from the El in Chicago

Lisa Higgins

I. "View from the Green Line, near Garfield Park"

Color C Print, Large Format with High Definition

The back of the leaning two-flat is framed
in the drapery of sheets and shirts hanging
straight over ropes pulled swag
from second-floor rail to razor-topped fence.

Junk on the ground so old it's invisible
to the black madonna and her disciple
sitting on the painted gray stairs.

Holding the workbook open on his knees,
the student of the West Side lifts a page
and catches the slanted illumination of the sun.

II. "Untitled"

Hand-colored Gelatin Silver Print

Homeless black man pointing to blood stain on pavement,
mouth gaped in silent horror,
gaped wide like a Greek thespian.
Plastic Walgreens bag clutched in right hand.
Blur of pedestrian in foreground.
Grey-tone everything, except blood, red.

III.

"Vessels"

After Man Ray

Black and White Photogram on Paper

Walking beside the cement columns
in the shade of the dirty tracks
your gaze angles up into bright sun.
Close your eyes for the reverse exposure
of a row of plastic bottles
all upturned on CTA fence spikes.
Opaque ghosts suspended in the dark sky.

Very often, I'll equate them to cattle, bearing a stark numbness of life, embodying some primordial madness entombed in modernity. There's a couple that comes in several days a week, often on an idle Tuesday and rainy Thursday, and their masking laughter blares over the dim chatter and soft Sinatra piped through the speakers overhead. He'll often order scotch. She'll often order tequila. Sometimes, I'll just see her come in with running mascara and tedious bags under her eyes. She'll keep to herself, she'll drink and she'll sometimes laugh, herself filling that indefinite silence or stationing that unbarred prison. When the hours have weaned away into the dense winter night, she'll slip me a twenty and, without eye contact, make her way for a cab on some distant corner. I'll stock the bar and wipe down the tables before I close for the night, making my way down Fifth to the apartment, listening to the awing silence of the city, wondering where the souls have stirred to. I've tried to get all of the booze out of the house by now, though; it's not an easy task. Water goes down the drain smooth, but scotch, it'll crawl as slow as sludge. Wine goes down heavy, but the smell lingers like death. Whiskey will whisper as you pour it down smooth, and it fades with the night. Brandy will stick to the aluminum siding, and you'll have to scrape it off with your fingertips. Then you get the urge to break an oath and lick your fingers clean. But you don't. You sit and watch it go down as you watch the years and mistakes tumble with it, equally as slow and equally as lingering. Then there's that one bottle left, that one bottle of Hors D'âge cognac you know you'll have to empty at some point, but you keep it in the case. You say you're keeping it as a token of the past, and you say you're leaving it as a test, but you know that it's the past asking for a mere thread of lifeline. And you can't help but offer it to them, to tantalize your morality, to justify your mistakes, to give into some nameless shove that calls to you from the dark recesses of the mind. I'll stare at the bottle several times during the night, drawing my attention away from the television or the newspaper, and any assortment of thought will come to mind, but all I remember is her. Her face tinged red by the snow and her breath a misty dust destined for oblivion. And then the broken glass, and the blood, and the hanging winter air, and then I find myself mewling for sleep as dawn creeps above the concrete horizon. The days have gone like this.

<><><>

She'll sit in the corner, reading a French novel of some sort. I'm not sure if it's a translation or in the mother tongue, but she has the air of a French woman. Her vague poise. Her supple skin. Her heavy lips. She's a smoker, and she'll fill her ashtray by the end of the night. The smoke escapes her slowly, her mouth and nostrils a cistern for that holy incense of obscurity. She'll sit there for hours with that lone novel and a sweating glass of cognac. I wonder if it's fate, and then I think otherwise. I'll return to work. The couple returns, drowning the room with their faux laughter. The ice machine breaks. I'll fix it, returning to find

the girl gone, a now-nameless face amidst the winter corridors and indifferent crowds. Then I'll wonder if she's a phantom, a ghost not from the past, but a future-borne seraphim. The man stumbles off with the woman, leaving a fifty and half-drunken glass of scotch. Sometimes I smell it, and I often remember how much I hated myself back then, but other times, I'll bring the glass to my lips and, slowly, grace my tongue with the liquid. I dare not swallow. I only taste. I entertain whatever lingers and swirls beyond these draping intentions and scattered nights. I pour it, check the ice machine, lock up, and walk the solitary trail once more.

<><><>

I have dreams about that night. It was our three-year. I had bought the ring with a loan from my father, an omen ignored. The nights were getting colder and colder, and she would start the Christmas decorating. We usually went out to pick our own tree, but she switched to a plastic one this year. She was a beautiful woman, without a French air, but with that Scandinavian swagger. But that wasn't what won me over. It was her smile, a smile that pierced through bad tempers and decrepit judgments. I came home and drank myself into a stupor, as I had done for months. She often took my abuse, but one night, as cold and desolate as hell, I went too far. It is amazing how an unaffectionate meeting of skin and a few drops of blood can alter one's life. It was a haze, a fog, a demon dance and a witch hunt for all time. I had not even my name to console me the next morning. I had only the memory of her haunting smile, fleeting now, as fleeting as her breath and touch. She had left, and all that remained was that damned tree and that ring. I rid myself of both, a baptismal purging, a consolation of renewal, a drunken pursuit of definition. And yet, that Hors D'âge sits defiantly behind a stale frame of glass, questioning, laughing, and I know not why it sits so proudly. Still, I can only be thankful that we did not end up like the patron couple, passing nights overshadowed by Sinatra.

<><><>

Months pass, and I never work up the courage to ask her name. She hasn't finished the novel, and as I peer from the corner of my eye, attending to that slurring couple, she'll not turn a page, as if she's frozen in a silk romance from a distant year. Her stone-frozen slender limbs glint from the dim bar lights, her lips freeze in an eternal kiss of life. And yet, she has not finished the book or the cognac. She'll leave the glass half-full and a crisp twenty, but she won't leave her name. She starts coming in with a friend, an equally slender creature, not so much bearing a French air, but an Italian zest, and she reflects an equally dense disposition, an obscure reference to some distant longing, a light in some distorted mirror of remembrance. She comes in with her friend for a month, still reading the same novel, still leaving the same glass of cognac to oblivion and my temptation. I decide that I will ask her name tomorrow.

<><><>

I bring the bottle to the edge of the sink, the thread tense against the fringes of multi-faceted longing. A longing for love, for finality, for dominance, for redemption. But I find that pouring the cognac will bring none of this. I find no savior in these precious drops. I would watch the seething liquid race down the

pipes, but the hollowness would still remain, the memories would still persist, the girl would still elude, and the wife would still be nothing more than a wisp of memory. I return the Hors D'âge to the case, and think about those smoke-graced lips and that unfinished novel.

<><><>

The friend tells me of the woman's fate. She had left town, an appointment or client calling her from a distant elsewhere, her air lingering over the horizons, a mist evaporating into eternity. The friend would not elaborate, and I would not ask for such a discourse, but it was both damning and sobering, releasing and enslaving. I found the friend read the same novel, a Clèzio piece, and filled the ashtray with the same cheap cigarettes, but unlike the French woman, she finished her cognac in a generous gulp. Perhaps it was the Italian in her. I walked her to the bar and talked her into twilight. The couple had not found their way in that night, and closing early, I walked her down the winter corridors. She gives me her name, and I hold it dear for the ensuing years. I bought the rings with my own funds, avoiding a folly bred of one part superstition and one part renewed dignity. The bottle will sneer silently in the case every so often, perhaps in a fit of mourning. It had emptied into both of our livers on a long-distant Christmas Eve. The bottle remains empty in the case, as a token of the past, as an acknowledgement of the thread that runs through men's lives. My own thread wears, but lingers throughout the years, and sews my destiny to both demons and angels.

The Old Tractor Trail

Suzanne Nance

I walk alone in the snowy field.
Last summer's tall grasses
Poke their long brown blades
Through the icy crust.
As I walk along the rutted path,
My foot slips into the trough,
The old tractor trail
Running through the pasture.
I watch my feet more carefully now,
Stepping with purpose and attention.
It's then I notice
The emerald green carpet
Down beneath the crushed, brown decay
Concealed below my feet
Alive and vibrant
Never dormant.
I stop to admire,
Bending low to the earth
Examining my find.
My gloved finger reaches down,
Stroking a small clump
Resiliently glued to a clot of dirt.
Radiant green, in tiny stems.
Brilliant color offsetting the drab of winter
Life in an otherwise comatose zone.
Oh the wonders of the moss.
Keeping its primordial life simple.
Unencumbered by seasons,
By light or dark,
Continuing its existence eternal.
Some would say hardy,
Others may regard it as insignificant.
It exists as it is
Splendid in all its color,
Tiny and delicate
Yet enduring and steadfast.
What more should a life be?
The under layer and foundation
Always present, near at hand,
Uncomplicated yet unique
Simple and beautiful

The hawk that flies to the nearby tree
Scolds me for my delay.
I leave my thoughts
And return to the immediate.
Lifting my head skyward from the furrow,
I gaze about the prairie that surrounds me.
Snow blankets the field.
Last summer's wild flowers
Remain only in broken, pithy shoots.
The tall stock of the Queen Ann's Lace
Elevates its fireworks arrayed scaffolding,
While the unpalatable burrs and thistles
Remain intact and upright.
I turn once more toward my path.
The sunken tractor trail leads onward.
I exhale completely.

He clips 90 lbs of steel discs to his waist
with a belt made of leather and chain,
and I can't help but stare. He steps
swiftly on the triceps dip, feet and elbows
brace the weight, Marine tattoos flex
when he grips the metal handles.

We both know he's in good shape,
he's confident, he's earned it—I see him
daily doing complicated routines.
He's there before I arrive, after I leave.
His hair's oiled and manicured as it was,
I imagine, when he was in his twenties.

No doubt, he's been sweating five to seven
days a week for maybe seventy years. He focuses
on something in the distance; I'm enamored
with the Geisha on his upper arm. He doesn't
check the mirror, so I don't know if he's aware

his range of motion is barely an inch today—
I'm sure he concentrates on the muscles' burn
each flexion, every dip, feels the steel bounce
between his tense thighs, just as they did
when he was twenty five.

Hiding From the Dead

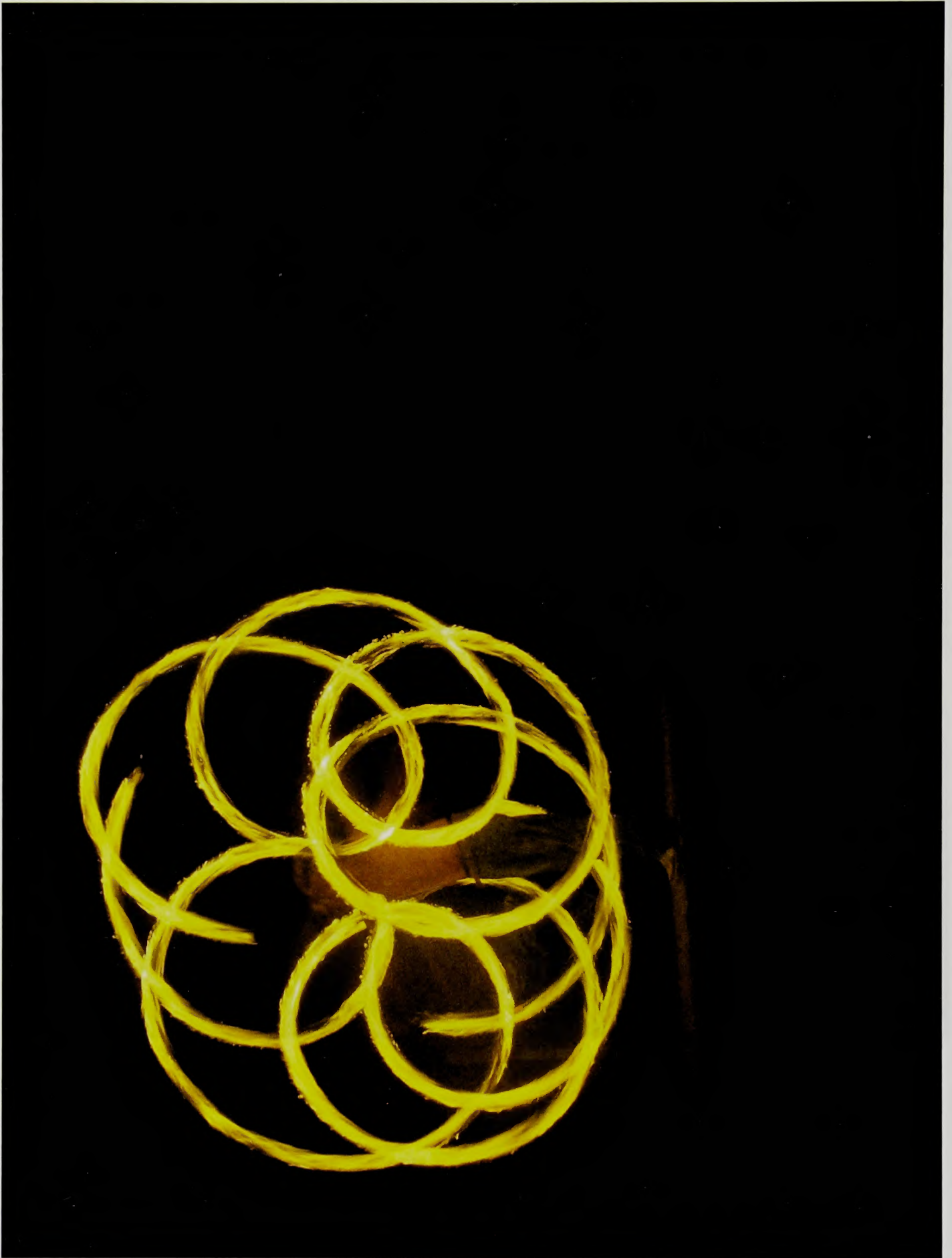
Sheri Lee Butler



oil painting

A Flower Made of Fire (Poi)

Courtney Bobko



color photography



acrylic painting

The Blue Swallow Motel

Thomas Henneman



color photography



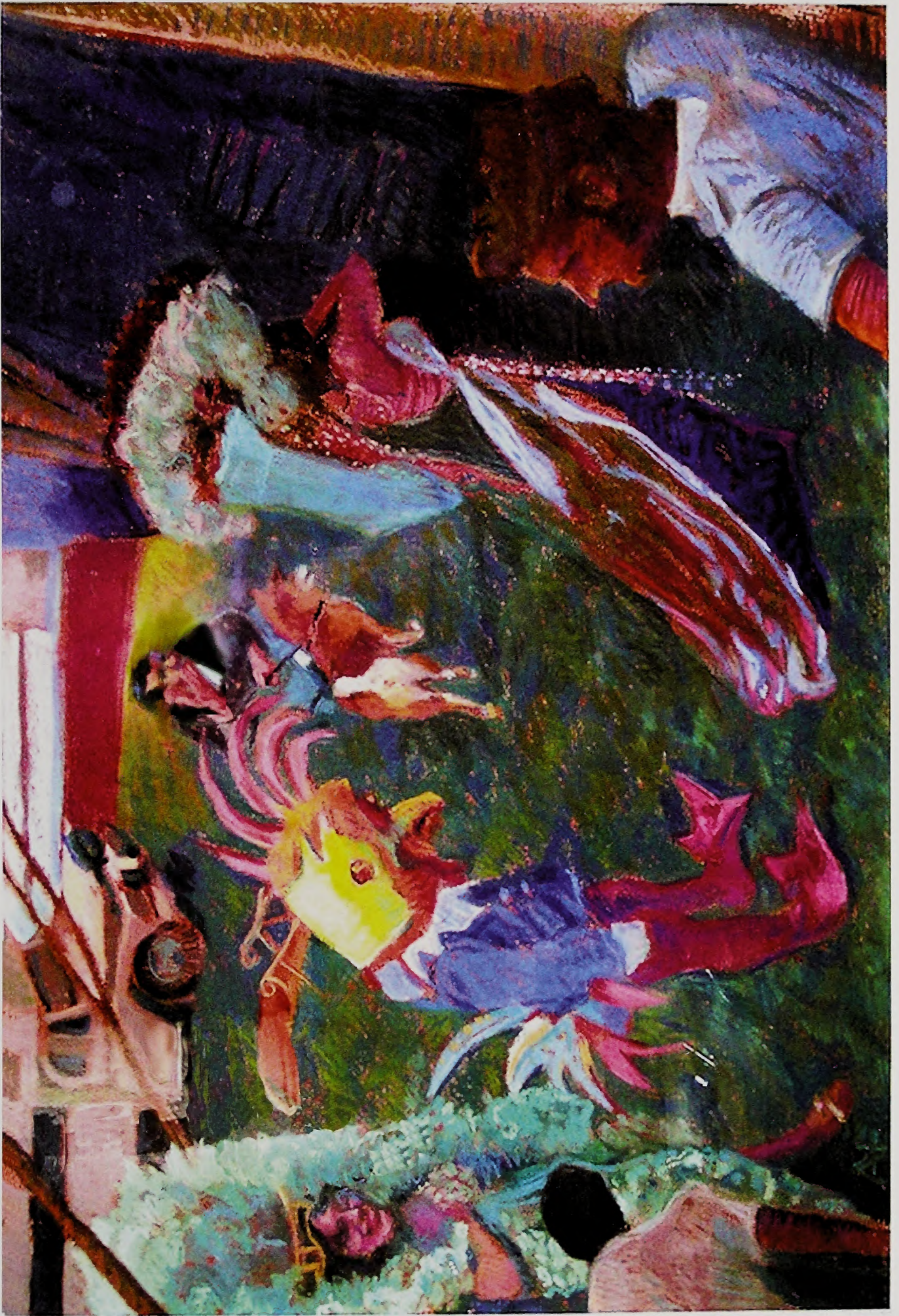
color photography

Fa-fa Firework!

Elizabeth Schrimmel



color photography



pastel

Little Boy at Church Doors--Florence, Italy

John Jakubowski



color photography



color photography

Batavia Riverwalk Pavillion

Thomas Henneman



color photography

Lady Pot

Siobhan Gasparotto



ceramics

The Elegant Stinkhorn

Sheri Lee Butler



oil and gold foil painting

The Secret Life of Origami

Chris Johnson



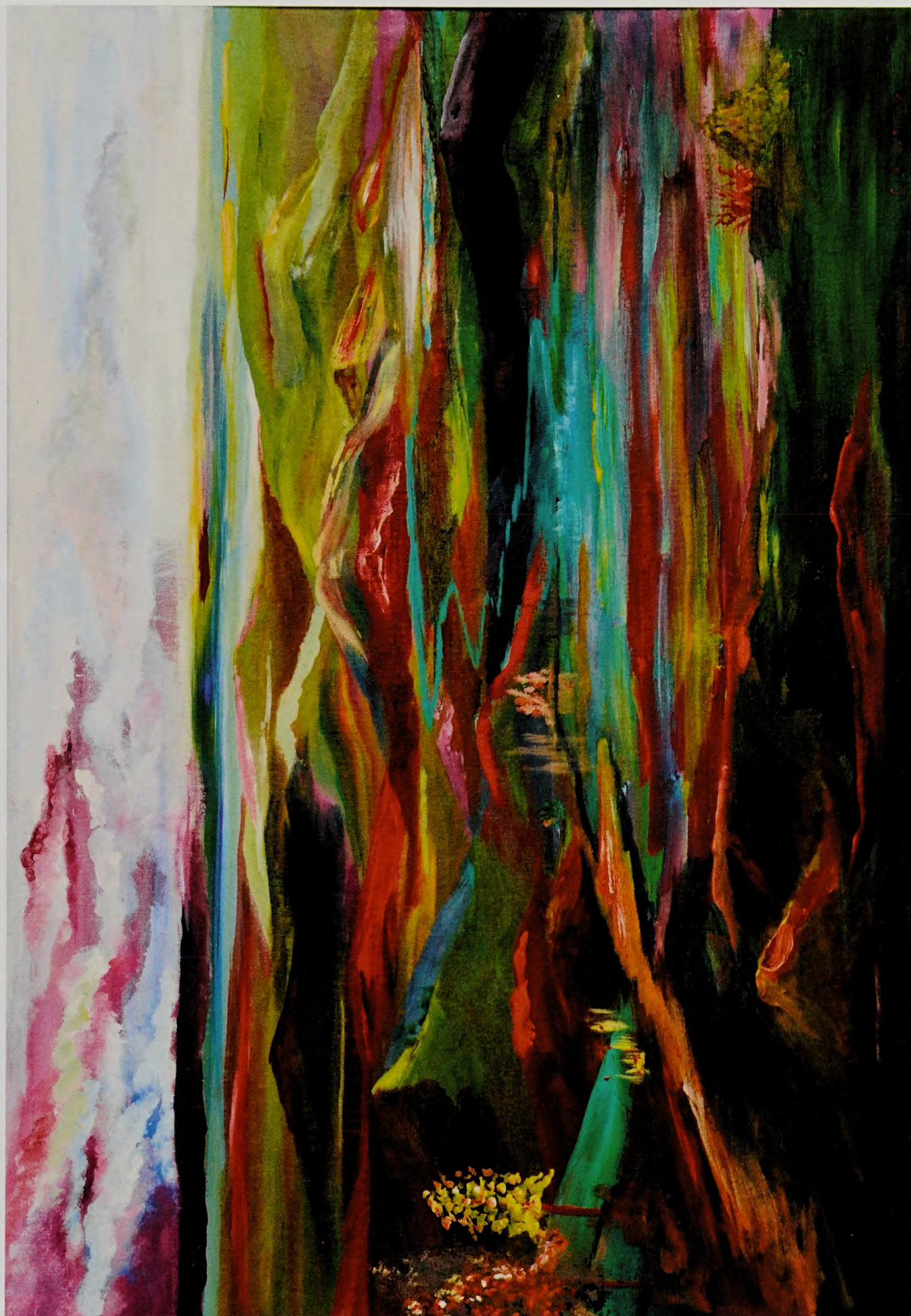
color photography



color photography

The Colors I See

Courtney Bobko



acrylic painting

After School

Denis Hagen



color photography

The (thoughtful) World Beyond the 140 Character Limits of Twitter. An Expansion of Sorts.

Prisca Kim

(3:04 P.M. Jun 25th from web)

“Due to the change in toilet paper quality, we have upped the allotted square allowance to 6 and 8, respectfully. Thank you for your continued cooperation.”
(Enforced by the Honor System)

As juniors, first year upperclassmen, my two roommates and I had managed to escape dorm assignments and found a two-bedroom, one-bath apartment to inhabit. Our fourth, Marie, my roommate-to-be, had decided to transfer out last-minute, and I was left with my own room. Our apartment had a kitchen, a living room, and a bathroom we didn't have to leave our quarters to use. Life was good. That is, until we realized the free toilet paper we had grown so accustomed to having, was only available to dorm dwellers. And we had given up that lifestyle. For the first few weeks, we purposefully carried around less in our backpacks and messenger bags, so space was available for the taking when the opportunity to smuggle presented itself. After almost a month of toilet paper trafficking, even between the three of us, there was no longer enough space in our bags. The semester had taken off, and, as Wheaton students, we decided our Gospel, Church and Culture textbooks were more important than one-ply toilet paper.

So we started buying our own.

At first, it really wasn't so bad. We agreed to take turns purchasing the toilet paper, as it was only fair, and two-ply was so much gentler on the ass. But as the weeks went by, our precious paper seemed to disappear like water into soil. Desperate to slow the use, and unwilling to return to our old thieving ways, we came up with a few ideas at our November roommate meeting:

1. drink and eat 30% less everyday
2. use napkins, printer paper, baby wipes, what have you, in lieu of the tp
3. have a set number of squares toilet occupant may use for #1 and/or #2

We went with the third option.

A Late Spring

John Flaherty

The morning sun appears and lingers high
Lost so long in the past gray cloudy maze,
But still I do not hear winter's goodbye

At night, moon-dogs show in the frosted sky,
Dimly glowing circles fade from my gaze
As morning sun appears and lingers high

Now I can see and feel its warming eye,
Couldn't see it in old, cold yesterdays,
But still I do not hear winter's goodbye

In shade it's cool; a few red robins try
To sing, can't see any blue-birds these days
As morning sun appears and lingers high

It softly glows so I cannot deny
The old willow now shows a yellow haze,
But still I do not hear winter's goodbye

The ropes that hold the south wind, I'll untie
To free the breeze, then see the tulips blaze,
With the bright morning sun lingering high
I'll hear winter's reluctant, sad goodbye

Embrace in the Rain

Natalia G. Toreeva



drawing

They met at a friend's apartment, friend for him, stranger for her. It was a three-fourths Korean, one-fourth Taiwanese dwelling, so it was hard for her to tiptoe through the sea of Nikes, Converse and Uggs that surrounded the door when she walked in. She didn't know anyone so she looked especially uncomfortable when she accidentally stepped on a stranger's pair, and quickly donned an overly apologetic expression in case the owner happened to cast a glance her way and witness the incident. She was big on first impressions. The television was on, some pro sport the guys sprawled on the blue couch parallel to the screen were watching, and she realized, while removing her sneakers, that she would have to interrupt their view of the game by walking to the only seat left vacant. Quickly mapping out the most efficient path to the chair while removing her North Face jacket to buy more time, she quietly stepped past the screen, trying her best to casually arrange the walk during a time-out or better yet a commercial break. To both her relief and slight disappointment, there was no verbal acknowledgment greeting her, only a few scattered glances noticing the "new girl" that she picked up with her limited peripheral vision.

Having successfully maneuvered past the unfamiliar bodies, she found comfort in the hard, flat seat of the campus-owned wooden chair. She began to try to look as nonchalant as possible but figured she was as easy to point out as Obama on the latest U.S. Presidents posters. Before long, her buttocks began to numb, but she continued to sit, feet propped up, all ten toes clinging, curled around the bottom railing of the chair, her fingers interlocked, hands squeezed between her knees. And as she futilely attempted to merge into the casual, warm ambiance of the apartment, all she was able to notice was exclusive conversation, mottled with delicious spurts of laughter and friendly physical contact, and desperately wished she could also be one to comfortably display such acts of chummy intimacy.

Deciding to temporarily ignore her overwhelming awkwardness, she scanned the room, curious about the make-up of her company. As an experienced fly on the wall, she studied the faces of each individual, careful not to concentrate her gaze, observing manner, voice, interaction, taking special interest in the male specimen. And there he was, sitting right across from her.. Startled, she quickly looked past him and pretended to be fixated on the cream-colored wall beyond. When her eyes deemed it safe to return their gaze to his face, she was able to learn his features. Tall and dark. But not handsome. Not objectively speaking. He stood at about 6'2", underweight, hair neither curly nor straight, but in little misbehaving tufts twisting this way and that, only a few shades darker than his complexion. His face was similar to that of a chestnut both in color and shape, one that gave her a subconscious boost of confidence as a member of the opposite sex—a countenance that could effectively serve as the epitome of modesty.

She was still considering his face when their eyes met from across the small table at which the two were seated; caught off-guard, she coyly smiled at him with a cautious shyness, one he immediately reciprocated. She saw his lips twitch, slightly parting, and gladly welcomed the approaching opportunity to finally talk to someone, and whittle away at the stiff aura she had made for herself.

He introduced himself as George Zane, repeating his first like James Bond, but with less effort and markedly reduced debonair. It was a pleasure to make her acquaintance and, might he ask, with a friendly chuckle, how had she found her way into this particular array of characters. He had a deep voice, reaching her in slow, resonant waves, and she found herself blinking more slowly than usual, as if time had actually decreased its tempo. By no means was it a romantic moment; it would never suffice as one of those schmaltzy “how-we-first-met” stories; nevertheless, it had its own endearing element, a sweetness to the instant, a flutter of the heart caused only by the knowledge of possibility.

The following weeks were comprised of casual meals together, study dates, movie nights, and after-dusk excursions—all platonic but exclusive to the two. In the car, (because there was never anything to do in their city after 8pm, nor was anything open), all you could hear was the quiet humming of the car and the occasional clearing of the throat, which would always be followed by the ever anticipated:

“What are you thinking about.”

It was a question, no doubt. They both knew. But the query-masked statement was purposeful. He would tell her after each prolonged moment of silence during their late-night excursions in his old bruised up '97 Honda. She looked forward to the question upon every meeting; she would savor each word, sitting beside him in the passenger's seat, breathing in deeply as if his voice had a scent, sometimes purposely remaining silent with the assured anticipation of the inquiry—because to her, the phrase expressed a yearning, a demonstration of his affection, a question which contained all he felt when he was with her. And while the two had never shared even a brief embrace, with every utterance of the expression, she could feel his arms around her, warming her body with his. A verbal hug, she liked to think. And she was content.

Posthole Digger

Jason Snart

I remove the faceplate to the light switch in the second bedroom.
This is easy. I am careful with the little screws,
set them gently in the upturned plate on the dresser.

I then unscrew, first, the bottom screw,
the one that holds the switch
tight inside the outlet box. This does not require
that I trip the breaker. Small flakes of paint
and drywall dust fall like snow globe snow.
I am pretty swift electrically, I get the idea,
and I'm ok with similes. This makes me
quite a catch for my lucky wife. A toolbelt
would suit me, I think, and casually begin
to unscrew the top screw.

Something snaps,
a flash, a blue popcorn pop, I tighten like a salted slug,
shoulders up eyes closed balls in – everything smaller –
the caveman reflex to protect what matters.

Then I peer to inspect a blackened copper wire,
the one I'd earlier screwed to the "Common" post
on the switch. I remember now,
this wire is "hot"; that's what we call them.
The live wires. That's what they're called. Hot.
And that top screw, as any electrician will tell you,
acts as the ground. This is important.

So today, a hot day, the ground heating up,
I've come to my office at the college.
I brush the dust off the raised lettering
that is glued to the window,
Associate Professor of English. Dust,
which I read somewhere is mostly human skin,
collects in the o bottoms and s tails.

Leafing through a manuscript on Thoreau,
I come across mention of a posthole digger.
A posthole is, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* will tell you,
"A hole made in the ground,
esp. to receive the foot of a post

in building a fence.” A posthole digger, noun,
is a tool for digging postholes. Seems simple enough,
safe enough. Big and substantial. Also,
this digger can be referred to as a posthole bore.

Roaches

Emily Ann Eubanks

deep black and light brown little Roaches crawl
out from under the trash on the floor
and leave footprints on my painted fingers
like Children running on a Church playground.

He Said That She Should--Proverbs 2:17-19

Mike Herbert



drawing

Hoarfrost

Jill Spealman

Frozen sigh of the earth, white.
Icy lace, crafted by snow sprites.
The gift of freezing fog paints our world.
Needling branches, prickling pods, lancing dried berries.
White rime gilds fences, as if touched by fairies.
Proof that the ground breathes, even in winter.
An odd name for something so beautiful, so rare.
Clinging. A beard of ice-crystallized hair.
Spiky lattice more precious than snowflakes.
Shy of sun's light, but one last act:
Frigid bristles shimmer down upon our path.
Glittering, rustling, fading.

A Fine Pair

Stephen H. Jansen

Old Henry could sit in front of the television for hours at a time. He loved the old black & white movies, the game shows, the sitcoms. They made him laugh. They made him cry. But most of all, they kept him company.

Get a dog, his doctor advised. The walks will keep you active. Get a cat, the neighbor lady suggested. It'll sit on your lap and warm those old bones. Get an aquarium, his son recommended. Colorful little fish swimming about can be entertaining. 'Ol Henry kind of liked the idea of sitting in his recliner watching fish at play.

BESSER'S PET EMPORIUM had every pet imaginable: slimy snails, hairy spiders, rainbow-colored fish, yapping puppies, even little white mice. Henry paused near a sign advertising "Half-Off All Gerbils".

"Those gerbils are a good deal," said a young salesman named Andrew with spiked hair and wrinkled Besser's tee shirt. "May I help you sir?"

"I'd like a pet. Perhaps a fish," Henry replied, not overly impressed with the young man nor the gerbils.

"Come with me," Andrew said. They walked down aisle after aisle of fishtanks, Andrew giving a long-winded description of each species. The warm humid air made the algae smell like stale grass clippings. After a while all the fish began to look the same.

"Shhh, listen," Henry interrupted. "What do you hear?"

Andrew tilted an ear in the air. "Nothing."

"Exactly," Henry remarked, wandering off.

A commotion at the rear of the store piqued his interest. There he found an enormous, gilded birdcage. Dozens of brilliantly colored birds fluttered from perch to perch. A cacophony of chirps, caws and little peeps resounded from the cage. The busy activity and constant noise mesmerized him. It was kind of like watching television - but in living color.

"Oh there you are," Andrew said, finally catching up to Henry. "I see you found our aviary."

"I think I'd like a bird," Henry decided.

"Good choice. Parakeets are ten percent off today."

LATER THAT EVENING Henry sat in his recliner before the television sipping a scotch on the rocks. His new roommate, Edwina, fidgeted about inside her new cage. She was jungle green with bright yellow highlights on her wings and belly. Having been at Besser's longer than any of the other birds, she'd been the easiest one to catch.

Henry took a sip of scotch, bubbling into the drink as he chuckled at the television. From somewhere behind him he thought he heard a hiccup of a laugh.

But then again, his hearing wasn't the best. After another humorous one-liner, he slapped his knee and guffawed. Again, more laughter behind him.

He swiveled his head around the room. Edwina sat still on her perch as if asleep. Henry shook his head and began counting the number of scotches he'd had when a low, breathy voice addressed him.

"So, was it my good looks or the ten percent off?"

Henry startled, turned around as far as his stiff neck would allow. Edwina fixated her pitch black eyes on him.

"You heard me. My striking beauty or the sale. Which one was it?"

Henry looked into his glass of scotch then at the parakeet. He rose from the recliner. The bird's head swiveled around as Henry circled the cage.

"Edwina, you... you talk?"

"Most parakeets talk, I, uh... what shall I call you?"

"My friends call me 'Ol Henry. But you can call me Henry," he said peering quizzically at the bird.

"Okay, Henry. As I was saying, I don't just talk. Unlike most parakeets, I think before I open my beak. What's that you're drinking?"

"Scotch."

"Buy a lady a drink?" Edwina said batting her eyelids. Her throaty, raspy voice intrigued him.

"Oh, where are my manners?" He said pouring a little scotch into the bird's water feeder. She immediately hopped over and dipped her golden beak into the feeder.

Edwina turned her shoulders sideways, dipped her chin and gazed over her shoulder at her new owner.

"So, why me?" She asked.

"Why you? Why me? Of all the parakeets in all the world, how did I deserve you?"

"Call it luck. I don't talk to just anyone, darlin'. But I happen to like you." Edwina spread her green-gold tail feathers wide as a fan. "Ahem," she said staring at his drink.

"Oh, I'm sorry, here you go," Henry apologized, pouring a little more for her.

"Well, such a gentleman."

He tried to remember where he'd heard that voice before. He'd been watching *The Big Sleep* with Humphrey Bogart earlier. That was it. Edwina's husky, seductive voice sounded just like Lauren Bacall's.

"Edwina, I know it's late but would you mind staying up with me for a while? I'm not the least bit tired."

"I thought you'd never ask, sweetheart." Edwina hopped down to the lowest rung in the cage. "So, where's the missus?"

"Ain't no missus. Hasn't been for a long, long time." Henry pulled himself up a bar stool from the kitchen counter. "My wife, well..." he rubbed his chin with his hand. "I caught her in bed with another man."

"Oh my!" Edwina gasped.

"My best friend. In our home. In our bed."

"What a tramp."

"That's what I thought. Shot her dead with the revolver I kept in the dresser. Shot him in the knee."

"You killed her?"

"Yep." Henry said in a grave tone, swirling his drink around watching the cubes circle in the glass. He poured Edwina a bit more. She nodded in appreciation.

"Why didn't you kill the bastard too?"

"I wanted to give him something to remember the rest of his life."

"Did you go to prison?"

"No. Manslaughter, suspended sentence. Turned out my so called best friend had been screwin' the judge's wife too."

"Reminds me of my first love." Edwina's black beady eyes grew larger, her chest swelled. "He was a beauty. Feathers blue as the Caribbean. Handsomest 'keet in the aviary. One night I'm dozing on my side of the perch, lean over and his side of the perch is cool. He's gone."

"Flew the coop?" Henry chuckled.

Edwina shot him a stern look he avoided by tipping his glass to his face, slurping loudly.

"Caught him over in the corner with some young canary half his age."

"I'm sorry," Henry said.

"Not as sorry as he was. I flew over. Little chickie flies off. And I proceeded to peck out one of his eyes."

"You did what?"

"You heard me. Pecked out his eye right then and there. Pretty boy blue spent the rest of his days flyin' around in circles."

"Whew, you're one tough cookie, Edwina." Henry climbed off his stool ambling into the kitchen for a refresher scotch. When he returned he sipped a little off the top making sure to pour some for Edwina too. She took a nip then stood to swallow but tipped back too far, almost falling off her perch. A quick beat of her wings kept her upright.

Henry watched Edwina closely as she fluttered her wings, primping herself. The combination of vibrant green and yellow feathers blended together on her chest in a muted ocean blue. And those dark, piercing eyes – Bogart would love them.

Henry and Edwina reflected on their conversation a while. An eerie almost confessional silence enveloped them both.

"Do you think we'll go to hell for what we did?" Henry asked.

"There is no hell," she replied.

"No hell?"

"Nope. You may come back as something else though."

"Like a parakeet?"

"Anything. You remember those half-price gerbils?"

Henry rose and opened the birdcage door, extending his finger for her.

“Would you like to join me for a movie?”

Edwina shook her feathers presentable and hopped on. “Sweetie, I thought you’d never ask.”

Spaceman

Eric Hart

I miss 2005. And do you remember-
grape swishers, the chainsaw seatbelt, broken windows, and hidden cellophane
wrappers?

I do and I miss it like hell. Or how about-
Long bus rides to Podunk, small town stadiums. Diesel fumes and the times we
spent looking at
overcast autumnal skies?

The issue is

I still look up to November skies with you by my side.
You look for gradients of shade 300 miles away.

Reach for the Sun

Connie Padera



black and white photography

Art Connection

Natalia G. Toreeva

I always remember
This statue, the Chicago Picasso -
The steel horse or woman's face,
I studied in Russia.

Now we're both here, in the heart of Chicago,
Two strangers together -
Face to face,
Two different worlds
Looking at each other.

I am so immensely grateful
For this titanic conversation -
Is it a metal woman's face in its abstract form,
Or just a human monster mask, made of a pile of iron rust,
Making a mysterious tie in this modern art connection?

Dad offers Grandpa's cane,
with the ornate golden dragon's
head, the glass flask hidden

inside its wooden shaft. This isn't
the cane Grandpa used most often
after knees' parts were replaced

with metal and plastic bits,
but one given as a gift, half joke,
half awe, that passed to Dad

after Grandpa passed away.
I've just graduated from crutches,
I'm home on holiday, and I try

the dragon in my palm. Its cold
and pokey, too narrow, and its shaft,
while polished and mahogany-hued,

too short. No doubt, Grandpa rejected
it for these same reasons -his great hands
could smother my own and he towered

over me. I favor the sturdy cane I carry,
laminated with a brown and black
wave pattern, bought at a medical supply

store in a Carbondale strip mall.
It's candy-cane shaped and arched nearly
at my hip. I lean the golden dragon,

nostrils flared, against the hearth
and am reminded of the stand
it rested in with other novelty canes

at my Grandpa's home. Try as I might,
I cannot conjure the image of his daily cane
-was it aluminum or wood- this third

leg I knew that helped him swagger
to my school plays, ballet recitals,
midnight church services in Decatur,

the dinner table my Grandma set
-it remains translucent in my mind
when I picture him, like the exact hue

of denim jeans he liked to wear, the exact
twangy song playing on the tinny bathroom
radio, the L'Amour or McMurtry titles

that sat on his side table. The details
have faded like so many snowflakes
on the panes tonight, but when I feel

my cane's heft, its smooth curve pressed
into my palm, the confidence of my stager
to the table, I remember his grace, the affectionate

poke he gave Grandma's bottom when she served
dinner, the grip of his hand when we played
later while the dishes were cleared: he'd grab

my fist and I'd pull and pull to let go
and he'd laugh until his fingers sprang open,
catching me, always catching me, before I fell.

Lewis and Clark...and Beer

Richard Jarman

Some things one never forgets; they range from events of great historical import to fleeting moments of ridiculous triviality. Quite why we remember all this rubbish is probably yet to be fully explained by psychoanalysis, but in the meantime these things linger, popping up at occasional unforeseen moments in the forefront of one's mind. I recall with vivid intensity, like a drug entering the vein, that moment in 2005 on the patio of The Pub on Bainbridge Island, the first seemingly innocuous sip from a pint of Skagit River IPA. Whether or not the shimmering beauty of Mount Rainier, its massive flanks bathed in the pale fire of the setting sun across Puget Sound, had any influence I cannot say, but the transformation, like that visited upon Saint Paul on the Damascus Road, was intense, instantaneous and irrevocable. Thus was my love affair with real American beer begun.

In the summer of 2008, with petrol prices soaring appropriately, Dulcie proposed the road as an alternative means of access to our traditional Pacific Northwest destination to the ritual of self-abuse formerly known as airline travel. Although the prospect of being locked in isolation with one's partner for several thousand miles was a little daunting, if it meant avoiding the humiliation of removing ones shoes at the snarling behest of the TSA in the name of "safety," I was game. Thus was our Big Beer Adventure born. The TSX's capacious trunk would furnish ample storage for the liquid mementos we would doubtless forage along the way. Our ultimate destination was Portland, known to the cognoscenti as Beervana. Yet between Chicago and Portland lay thousands of miles to navigate and beer to discover. Unbeknownst at the time of our departure, we would learn of weightier things while in pursuit of the amber nectar.

The route to the PNDub is quite straightforward; you basically take the Mannheim road north from Chicago and don't lift till you get to Washington. As the journey unfolded, we noted references to "Lewis and Clark Trail" with increasing frequency. Our voyage of beer discovery had become inextricably linked with that epic crusade into the then undiscovered bourn of the west two hundred years prior. I had heretofore been largely ignorant of all things Lewis and Clark. There had been a fifth grade musical, as badly acted as it was written, and all I recall were two chaps, a boat, and a Native American girl of unpronounceable name.

While Lewis and Clark had forged their journey against the currents of the mighty Missouri in a tiny boat, we found the endless miles of I-94 much easier sledding, although the \$4.40 per gallon was the cause of some discomfort. Our navigation was at all times aided and abetted by Dulcie's reliable Crackberry, the miracles of wireless communication providing instant intelligence as to where to stay, where to dine and where, more importantly, to drink. Lewis and Clark had only dead reckoning and Sacagawea.

In Big Sky country we took shelter in the pleasant university town of Missoula, nestling in the shadow of the Bitterroots, which form a northern promontory of the Rockies. There we made our major discovery, Big Sky IPA, a stunningly hoppy citrus beer. Taking our cue from Lewis and Clark, who recorded in minute detail every piece of flora and fauna they came across, contributing inestimably to the natural science of America in the process, we duly recorded copiously detailed notes of our finds in Beer Advocate.

In Missoula, Highway 12 rises sharply to crest the Bitterroots at the Lolo pass before swooping down some seventy miles alongside the Lochsa until it joins the Snake River at Lewiston (I imagine the giant toilet paper factory that greets one on its eastern edge was a sign of great comfort to our intrepid explorers). The Lolo pass was the last great obstacle facing Lewis and Clark in their journey to the Pacific. These mighty mountains had already squashed any hope of finding a simple passage joining east and west. What took us less than two hours in one of the all-time drives, Dulcie wailing unabashedly with pleasure (I think) beside me, took them sixteen days. Lewis recorded that he was the coldest and wettest he had ever been, beset by unexpected snow in early September. This was inhospitable territory, and largely still is.

By the time we reached Portland, having travelled the length of the Columbia Gorge (a chasm of unsurpassed, moist, craggy beauty), I had become as intrigued by the story of these men as I was about the beer we were thirstily devouring en route. Experiencing at first hand the still formidable lands they had conquered with nothing underscored the magnitude of the achievement. Later I read *Undaunted Courage* by Stephen Ambrose and watched Ken Burns' breathtakingly beautiful documentary about the Corps of Discovery. I learned more. Meriwether Lewis was a complex, unconventional hero. On the eve of only his 30th birthday, just before ascending the Lolo, on the cusp of completing the greatest voyage of discovery in American history, he penned the following thoughts:

"...I reflected that I had as yet done but little, very little, indeed, to further the happiness (sic) of the human race, or to advance the information of the succeeding generation. I viewed with regret the many hours I have spent in indolence, and now soarily (sic) feel the want of that information which those hours would have given me had they been judiciously expended. but since they are past and cannot be recalled, I dash from me the gloomy thought, and resolved in future, to redouble my exertions..."

Evidently self-esteem building was not prevalent in the 18th century American education system. Only the extreme life and death challenges presented daily by the voyage seemed to concentrate Lewis' mind sufficiently to keep him from the abyss. Later, despite being lauded with land and status, he did not prosper. Summoned to Washington, alone in a remote wayside inn, he topped himself. I don't remember that from the fifth grade musical. Imagine the uproar if little

Johnny raised a gun to his head in the final rousing chorus, generous gouts of fake blood sluicing the front rows. We tend to associate our heroes with superhuman perfection; but, while I am not condoning self-slaughter, I find encouragement in the fact that greatness can be achieved despite the afflictions of the very human failings of self-doubt, uncertainty and fear.

Cracker Saving

Courtney Bobko

A very general, yet rather fascinating idiosyncrasy I have observed in the lives of many elderly people came to me one day. An older woman was pulling her jacket on next to me, and something fell out of her pocket. As I heard the twinkling of cellophane hitting the floor and looked down, I realized old people are naturally drawn hoarding little packages of crackers. And why not? They are usually free, conveniently small, and rather tasty.

Now, I am not giving a specific age of when an older person falls into this habit. However, it has been my general observation if the person's hair is white (or slightly purplish from a dye-job gone wrong) a hobby of collecting the free packages of crackers probably consumes some of their thoughts while at a restaurant.

It is a hunch of mine, whether it be at a diner or a take-it-to-go joint, packages containing two saltine or oyster crackers are rarely used at the time of obtainment. I have noticed women in particular stealthily stash their goodies in their purses. My guess to the rationale behind this is to eat the crackers later or offer to a fussy grandchild. The problem with this good-hearted action is these crackers are usually forgotten about for too long.

It is very sweet to see a grandma digging through her purse to "see what she has" for her hungry grandchild who sits patiently next to her. As the side pocket's zipper is pulled open by slightly stiff fingers, the shiny cellophane catches the light, and Grandma remembers the treasure she removed from the napkin-lined basket at the diner "just a few nights ago". Unfortunately, the once whole saltine crackers meant to go on her home-style chicken noodle soup (four months ago) resemble a cross between finely smashed bread crumbs and an unnatural grayish powder. She "could have sworn that wasn't going to happen again," but the fact of the matter is there is usually no other fate for crackers that travel outside of restaurant walls in an uneaten state.

I do not see this as a societal problem or an issue to be fixed. Rather, I view cracker saving as an endearing idiosyncrasy. When I was in third grade, I became the receiver of two rare, undestroyed saltine crackers given to me by my great grandma. It was care and love in a crinkly package, a small treasure she wanted to share with me. And even though I am fully aware of the Live to Death rate of crackers in purse pocket, I will probably become one of those cracker stashing old women who joyfully gives away what should have been stirred into my soup.

A Memorable Marking

John Gordon

Not every flavor
Delivered from our holiday kitchen
Was pleasing to my eight year old palate.
The perfectly browned turkey,
Laden with sage seasoned stuffing
And those slightly spicy, still warm
Pumpkin pies were offset
By the pungent unpleasantness
Of steamed cauliflower
And creamed parsnips.
My prejudice against white vegetables
Was born.

An ancient mahogany dining set
Easily accommodated
Mom, Dad, two uncles and four aunts.
From our outpost at the kids table,
My cousin Patsy and I could neither escape
Nor decipher eight simultaneous conversations.

Dinnertime dazzled:
 Seldom seen china adorned the tables
 Tinkling crystal launched wine-fueled toasts,
 Piquant pie wedges turned quickly to crumbs.
Final tastes savored, cigarette smoke clouded the room
Rising to further stain the ceiling.

Anticipation accelerated the cleanup.
Mom distributed worn Bingo cards
Then released the contents
Of a battered tin container. Hundreds
Of dried corn kernels bounced onto the table,
Divided into piles by eager players.

Expecting to be banished,
My cousin and I were invited to play.

My first stack
Of shriveled corn kernels
Marked more
Than just Bingo cards.

Strawberry Jam

Garrett Ball

Like a slice of bread before you I lay.
Your skin,
With all of its pores,
As seeds are spread you advance.
Atop,
Flesh to flesh,
I fill my cup.
Breast to breast I laugh
-Strawberry jam.

Hope

Patricia Gangas

Looking backward, I returned to the road I traveled.
Grace in its fullness came through hard winters and calamities,
for each New Year God gathered at my side
rescuing me in unclenching clear depths.
Trudging along with my unraveling heart,
stranded in descending shadows,
my thinning days slipped into months, then to years—
though I weathered fogs of doubt, I never lost hope.
How fortunate to have had a life-long companion
who walked with me over moon-drenched roads
folding all distances into His rivers of grace.

Grasping the knitted void of this Partner,
I became drunk on the dreams and hope of love.
Grace in its fullness came.

Treadmill

Liz Whiteacre

You've set my gait,
Left me to dash
Down hallways, no
Dawdling. 'Til
Ida remarks
On my swift steps,
I don't notice
My shoes chew
Carpet four feet
At a time-Where
Ever I go,
Classes, meetings,
After-dinner
Hikes, bridal aisles,
The zoo. I blame
You, your measured
Frame, measured speed,
Measured incline.
You have left your
Imprint. I walk
Like a hamster
In cyclical
Steps, beating, re-
Peating, pounding
Pavement, concrete,
Porcelain tiles
In precise steps.
I no longer
Remember my
Pace at twenty
Two. I am stuck
At 4.2 –
On a good day.
I think we must
Sweat together;
That our efforts,
As we grow old,
Synchronize. Our
Resolute march
Toward the last red
Column flashing

A victory,
As long as we
Don't break stride

Halls of Anubis

Richard Marshalla

Descending into the labyrinth of hallucination
There exists a place
Where whispers of the gods
Echo through sands of antiquity

Pillars of limestone
And statues of jade marble
Illuminated by the eye of providence
Within the crypts of hypnagogia

Men wearing animal masks
Worship the gibbous moon
While laughing jackals
Dance in the red sun

Beyond the gloaming wasteland of doubt
Into the yawning catacombs of nightmare
Angry ghosts beat drums
To the rhythm of lingering hatred

Those who fear death
Are condemned to its madness
But those who embrace death
Shall be freed from its grasp

Betrayal

Mardelle Fortier

Down into the
Deepest velvet-seeming dark

No one can betray you so well.

Into the silence, complete and pure...
Into the shiny stone inside the mild smile...
Shadows lace themselves like fingers
Inside your screaming ears.
No one does it so cleverly.
Caves, apparently high and solid, of ice:
Touch them—you plunge through to

Darkness sleek as the lids
That cover blind eyes.
You stand burning at the stake
In fire soft as gasoline.
No one
Can betray you
Like a sister can.

Dodger

Kristi Roe



black and white photography

This Must Be The Place

Erin Landry

Matthew was allowed to go home, finally, but there were conditions. No houseplants, no pets, no minor visitors until his white blood cell count was normal. And his mother, Nancy, augmented the rule about visitors. "Germs don't discriminate against people over the age of 18," she'd said to Matthew while spraying disinfectant on his bedroom doorknob. "And it's flu season."

It didn't make much of a difference, anyway. Matthew had missed so much school over the past two years that he was practically a stranger there. And he had only a tiny smattering of relatives living nearby.

Pete, the beagle, was exiled to Matthew's grandmother's house, along with the African violets, the begonia, the philodendrons, and the ficus tree. The house smelled like Lysol and Clorox, rubbing alcohol and latex gloves, apple-scented hand soap and chicken broth.

Matthew's fingers were too clumsy for video games, his eyes were too tired for television and books, and his mouth was too sore for solid foods. But upon his return home, Nancy gave her son a gift, wrapped in pale blue paisley-patterned paper and thin silver ribbon. Matthew unwrapped the present slowly, trying not to tear the paper. He knew his mother liked to save gift wrap, and this looked special. His weak fingers worked carefully, peeling tape until he could slide the gifts out from the intact paper – a chestnut-colored leather case and a black leather-bound book. "Open it," Nancy said, touching the leather case.

Matthew opened the case's clasp and found his grandfather's vintage binoculars inside. They were heavy, black and brass, and Matthew recognized them immediately. His grandpa had always kept them in his living room, his bird watching room, alongside the bird guide. He opened the book and saw his grandfather's painstakingly neat notes next to colored renderings of loons and hawks and chickadees and goldfinches.

"I was waiting for a special occasion to give these to you, a big birthday, like your 16th. But this is a sort of birthday, isn't it?" Nancy placed her hand atop Matthew's hairless head.

"Thank you, Mom," Matthew whispered in his new, tremulous voice that still sounded foreign to him. "I remember these." He smiled at his mother and lifted the book to his lips.

Nancy hung a gazebo-shaped cedar bird feeder on the magnolia tree outside Matthew's bedroom. And every time she looked in on her son, he had the binoculars to his face, his frail, trembling hands, almost translucent in the sun, clutched around them. And she was touched.

But Matthew wasn't watching birds. He was watching the Murphys.

The Murphys lived across the street in an oversized Victorian with a wraparound porch and a three-car garage. Matthew knew the Murphy family lived there, but he'd never spoken to them, and neither had Nancy. The two families

were sometimes forced to exchange quick, awkward waves from across the street, looking down or away as soon as politely possible. But that was the extent of their neighborly relationship. The Murphys had two children, a son and a daughter, much younger than Matthew. And the disparity between their ages eased the awkwardness of never having spoken, because they really didn't have much reason to, then, did they? The boy was probably seven, and the girl, perhaps five. They had strawberry blonde hair and, Matthew had recently noticed, lots of rosy color in their cheeks and lips. Through the binoculars, they always looked like they'd just climbed a flight of stairs, or like they had secrets they were dying to tell.

Often, the Murphys were away, and when they were, Matthew focused on the house. The house was yellow, a creamy buttercup yellow. It was the color of Matthew's favorite treat, the lemon gelato from the Italian deli, the color of his baby blanket that his mother had slept with every night she couldn't spend with him in the hospital. From his bedroom, Matthew could see, but only partially, only in meaningless fragments, the kitchen, the dining room, the boy's bedroom, and an office on the top storey. He had a very clear view, though, of the deck off the kitchen, the verdant backyard, the red brick driveway, and the immaculate three-car garage. The deck, large and whitewashed, was replete with a huge stainless steel grill, a round, glass-topped table, and chairs with cushions that matched the mango-striped table umbrella. The backyard was enclosed by a white picket fence and perfectly-pruned boxwood shrubs. The house's red brick chimney, extending high into the sky, was like a candle on top of a birthday cake.

Matthew's house was a tiny fraction of the size of the Murphy's. It was a two-bedroom ranch, its grey paint peeling and chipped. Something was always broken or busted or leaking. The hedges in the front yard were in bad need of trimming. The basketball hoop on the garage was lopsided. The concrete front stoop was crumbling in places. But Nancy did her best, her very best, to keep the place looking decent. She was an expert housekeeper, and even though the appliances didn't always work, they always glistened.

Four years earlier, before either of them had heard of lymphoblastic lymphoma or autologous stem cell transplant or leukocytes or neutrophils, when Nancy and Matthew had looked at the little grey house with the realtor, it was vacant. Nancy had dashed through each room, the color in her cheeks rising as she went along, crying out about the six-panel doors and the breakfast nook and the brick fireplace. When they'd finished their tour, she twirled on the hardwood floors in the living room. "This must be the place," she said, taking Matthew's hands in hers. "We're home."

They moved in a month later, and Nancy scrubbed and scoured and polished the place until every surface gleamed. And then Matthew felt a lump in his armpit, and even though Nancy never stopped cleaning, everything stopped shining.

There was usually a flurry of activity in and around the yellow house. Helena's Housekeeping and Schmitt's Landscaping and Harvest Grocery Delivery and Dilly Lilly Florist frequented the Murphys, so there was always plenty to

watch. But Matthew liked watching the Murphys best of all.

Mr. Murphy was square-jawed and steely grey-eyed and salt-and-pepper-haired. He looked like a department store catalog model or a politician, and he was always outside, working in the driveway or the garage, often accompanied by his fair-haired, pink-cheeked children. Mrs. Murphy had wide hips and a thick mane of blonde hair. She wore big, oval sunglasses and shirts with bold-colored stripes. Mr. and Mrs. Murphy always looked as if they'd just returned from a Caribbean vacation; they were tan year-round.

Matthew was watching Mrs. Murphy unload shopping bags from her silver BMW SUV one afternoon when his mother knocked softly on his door.

"Time for a little walk, kiddo," Nancy said. "Hate to pull you away from the birds, but Dr. Myers said we have to try to do this everyday."

Matthew blushed through his skeletal pallor as he put the binoculars in their case and followed his mom to the study, where the monstrous treadmill took up most of the room.

"Have you seen anything interesting today?" she asked as she programmed the machine for a slow 15-minute walk.

"A couple cardinals earlier," Matthew lied. "And a red-winged blackbird."

"Not bad," Nancy crooned in a singsong voice, turning to Matthew and smiling broadly. "Grandpa would be proud."

Matthew had seen two cardinals yesterday and a red-winged blackbird the day before. At least he wasn't completely fabricating the sightings. But still, he couldn't meet his mother's eyes.

"Well, this thing's finally getting a little use," Nancy said as she helped Matthew onto the treadmill. Matthew wanted to tell his mother that she didn't need the treadmill, anyway, that she was thin, thinner than Mrs. Murphy across the street, but he was weak and he had to conserve every ounce of his energy for the 15-minute walk. Nancy stood beside the treadmill, looking down at the ground as Matthew focused on putting one foot in front of the other.

Nancy was indeed thinner than Mrs. Murphy. But she never looked rested or tanned. Matthew had lost a terrible amount of weight. He'd lost hair, his eyebrows. But he didn't care, really. They'd come back. The weight would, too. He thought his mother looked much worse. She'd always had circles beneath her eyes, but now they were darker, and tinged with blue. Her dark brown hair was thinner, and its shine was gone. Her skin was dry and dull, and her once bright green eyes had dimmed. She'd always been stressed and overworked and alone. But she'd looked contentedly exhausted, and the little lines around her eyes crinkled when she smiled. Now she looked sad and old and weary, and those lines no longer crinkled.

Matthew finished his walk and dismounted the treadmill with Nancy's help. He felt lightheaded as she helped him back to bed. He was too tired even to watch the Murphys anymore that day. His mouth was a hotbed of horrible little sores, and the little food he could manage tasted like metal. His legs felt rubbery and his head throbbed, and he fell into a fitful sleep for the rest of the day, until Nancy knocked on his door again, ready to give him his nightly injections.

The next morning, a Saturday, Matthew woke feeling stronger. He propped himself up in bed and looked out on the Murphy's house. Mr. Murphy was crouching over his son's neon green bike in the driveway, adjusting the seat. The little girl, wearing pink sunglasses and a pink visor, zoomed up and down the Murphy's half of the sidewalk in a miniature pink Barbie Cadillac Escalade. It looked almost precisely like the family's Escalade, except that theirs was ivory. Mrs. Murphy sat on the deck, on one of the cushioned chairs, reading the newspaper, an iced coffee drink and a plate of fruit on the table in front of her.

The boy appeared on the deck and stopped to pick from his mother's plate of fruit. He took every piece of watermelon and every grape before sprinting off to the driveway where his father worked on the bike. He sat beside his father and popped the pieces of fruit into his mouth, watching as his sister whizzed by, over and over, in her Escalade. Soon, Mr. Murphy had finished adjusting the seat, and the boy was riding alongside his sister, racing up and down the block. Mr. Murphy joined his wife on the deck, watching the children go by in a blur of pink and green. Mrs. Murphy occasionally reached for her iced coffee and took tiny sips through the straw, but she never raised her head from the paper. Matthew watched until Nancy knocked on his door with the breakfast that he wouldn't end up eating.

While Nancy escorted him to the treadmill for his daily walk the following afternoon, Matthew decided that cardinals and blackbirds were not all that exciting. He wanted to see his mother's eyes light up the way they used to, he wanted her to be happy, if only for a moment, so when she asked the question she now asked everyday at exercise time, Matthew had a new answer.

"I saw a hummingbird, actually," Matthew said, climbing atop the treadmill unassisted. "A broad-billed hummingbird. They're not that common here."

"Well, that's something!" Nancy said. And her eyes lit up the way they used to, and she was happy, for a moment. "You're really becoming an expert ornithologist." She gave Matthew's arm a gentle squeeze.

"Yeah, it's really helped," Matthew said, nodding solemnly. "I don't know what I'd do without it."

Matthew began his treadmill walk and didn't say anything else about the broad-billed hummingbird. Nancy stood beside him and swayed back and forth a little to music in her head.

A few days later, Nancy bought a hummingbird feeder and instant hummingbird nectar from the wild bird store in town. She mixed the nectar in the kitchen and installed the feeder in the same tree as the gazebo feeder. Matthew felt awful as he watched her work, even as she smiled and sang to herself, even as the circles beneath her eyes seemed suddenly smaller.

The next week, on a Sunday afternoon, Matthew watched the Murphys with stronger eyes. The binoculars didn't feel as heavy as they usually did, and Matthew's grip was sure and solid.

The ivory Escalade and its pink miniature were parked alongside each other in the driveway, and Mr. Murphy and the girl were busy washing their respective vehicles. She wore a polka-dotted turquoise bathing suit and she

laughed as her father sprayed her with the hose. The boy splashed around in the backyard in a pirate ship-shaped inflatable pool, outfitted with a slide, a black skull and crossbones flag, and a water-blasting cannon. He aimed the cannon at various backyard targets – squirrels and trees, the picnic table, the picket fence.

Mrs. Murphy emerged from the house, wearing an orange-striped two-piece bathing suit and carrying her iced coffee. She walked through the yard, taking high steps in her fluorescent flip flops, before settling on a chaise lounge chair. She lay on her stomach, her head turned to one side, the side Matthew couldn't see, and her bare shoulders and blonde hair glinted in the sun.

The boy, tired of squirrels and trees, aimed the pool's water cannon toward his lounging mother and sprayed her, laughing maniacally. The blast of water hit his mother with more force than Matthew imagined it could, and she leapt from the chair like an angry tabby cat. She dragged the boy inside by his elbow, her blonde ponytail now sagging and soaked. She'd taken her sunglasses off, and Matthew saw, perhaps for the first time, her eyes, blue and blazing.

Mr. Murphy turned off the hose and put his sponge into a bucket before taking the girl by the hand and leading her through the yard and into the house. The two Escalades were left soapy and dripping, Mrs. Murphy's iced coffee lay overturned in the grass, and the pirate ship pool leaned to one side, its black flag like a wilted flower.

Matthew looked at the magnolia tree, the two feeders side by side, swinging lazily in the breeze. And then, in a blue-green flash, there it was – a broad-billed hummingbird. He was sure of it, because he'd studied it in case Nancy had pressed him for information when he'd told the lie. It was a male, with a bright metallic blue throat and iridescent dark green feathers. It hovered like magic in front of the feeder, its wings an almost imperceptible charcoal blur, its airborne body perfectly still. It pressed its bright red-orange beak to the feeder, suspended in the air, a shock of teal and cyan. And it was gone.

Matthew opened his grandfather's bird guide to the hummingbird section, and in his neatest, most careful print, he recorded the date next to the picture and description of the broad-billed hummingbird. His grandfather had recorded one date there before him, twelve years earlier. Matthew closed the book and put the binoculars in their case. He got out of bed and went to find his mother, to tell her what he'd seen, to watch her eyes dance.

As he walked through the house, he felt a rush of love for his broken body, his burgeoning immune system, his tiny, fatherless family, his tired, beautiful mother. For a moment, his heart beat like the hummingbird's wings as he made his way to the kitchen, where his mother was making grilled cheese and tomato soup, just for him.

Please visit <http://dc.cod.edu/plr/> to view the second and third place winning stories for the 2010 Prairie Fiction Award. The second-place winner is Abigail Benoit and the third-place winner is Scott Benfield.

